

BIG BROTHER IS NOT JUST WATCHING YOU; HE IS ALSO MANIPULATING YOU

During the 2016 Presidential race, the Trump Campaign paid about \$6 million to Cambridge Analytica, a company that specializes in the use of psychological data obtained from social media to target key voters. Until recently, White House senior strategist Steve Bannon was on the board of this Company, whose primary shareholder is Robert Mercer, the reclusive hedge fund billionaire who first backed Ted Cruz in the Republican presidential primaries, and then threw his support to Trump. Both Kelly Ann Conway and Bannon are close associates of Mercer, who largely took control of the Trump campaign and then the White House after the hasty departure of Paul Manafort as Trump's Campaign Chairman in August 2016.

In March 2017, in a little noticed announcement amidst all the recent flurry of activity involving the investigations of Russian interference in the 2016 election and former national security advisor Michael T. Flynn's offer to testify if granted immunity, SCL Group (formerly known as Strategic Communications Laboratories Ltd.), the London-based parent company of Cambridge Analytica, just finalized a contract with the U.S. State Department's Global Engagement Center (GEC). Cambridge Analytica's CEO Nigel Oakes and Kirsten Fontenrose, a former State Department employee who recently joined the company, were also spotted meeting with officials at the Pentagon.

“It’s like drinking from a fire hose,” crowed Matt Oczkowski, Cambridge Analytica’s head of product, said in an interview at the company’s new Pennsylvania Avenue offices.¹

“Besides Antarctica, we’ve gotten interest from every continent.”

Much of the interest by the public and governmental agencies is driven by the Company’s apparent success in using psychographics, the study of personality traits, to predict and even influence (or manipulate) an individual’s behavior. By measuring qualities such traditional psychological categories as openness, conscientiousness and neuroticism, and then adding what the Company refers to as its “special sauce.” It also claims to have the ability to actually drive people to take action, such as voting for a particular candidate, and given its surprising back-to-back successes with the Brexit UK and the Trump Campaign, it has increasingly won over sceptics.

What Cambridge Analytica did in the 2016 Presidential campaign closely paralleled what the Russian cyber campaign effectively did during the same time period, which was to “weaponize” the use of personal information – such as that collected from millions of Facebook and Twitter accounts – and then to overwhelm those accounts with links and individually-tailored “issue” messaging that was either highly favorable to Trump or highly critical of Hillary Clinton.

In many ways, however, Cambridge Analytica’s voter manipulation capabilities were far more sophisticated than even Russia’s cyberwarfare campaign designed to destabilized and undermine the 2016 Presidential election process and, incidentally, to help get Trump elected. By

¹ *Textifire*, March 19, 2017, “SCL Group Joins the US State Dept.-Robert Mercer-funded Cambridge Analytica’s foreign parent company signs a deal to do propaganda work for State’s Global Engagement Center.”

leveraging automated emotional and psychological manipulation with the use of swarms of bots, Facebook dark posts, A/B testing, and data from alt-right/fake news networks, Cambridge Analytica successfully “activated an invisible machine that prey[ed] on the personalities of individual voters to create large shifts in public opinion.”²

One disturbing aspect of the 2016 Presidential Campaign was the ability of the Trump Campaign, through Cambridge Analytica’s highly sophisticated data system, to respond almost instantaneously to WikiLeaks’ data dump of thousands of pages of DNC and John Podesta’s emails. Within a couple of hours of the release of this mass of documents, the Trump Campaign was sending out targeted information to Western Pennsylvania and other key battleground states, specifically referencing the most relevant and/or embarrassing emails provided by WikiLeaks. While reporters spent days pouring over the WikiLeaks data to try to determine what was newsworthy and what was irrelevant, the Trump Campaign seems to have been totally geared up and primed to do key word searches for the most relevant documents and then to instantaneously transform that information into effective marketing material to undecided voters in key districts.

Was this just pure preparation, professionalism and foresight, or was there something darker at play? Did the Trump Campaign and Cambridge Analytica have some advance notice as to what to be looking for in the WikiLeaks data dump, so that they could expedite their search and get the data quickly out to the targeted audience? That is a question that the Congressional intelligence committees and the FBI are undoubtedly looking at, and the executives of

² *Scout, supra.*

Cambridge Analytica and SCL might be in a position to provide some useful insights into this issue.

The SCL Group's contract with the State Department's GEC promises to be the first of many. Formerly known as the Center for Strategic Counterterrorism Communications (CSCC)—first established by President Obama's Executive Order 13584 in 2011, it was renamed GEC by President Obama in 2016, and was codified into law as part of the "Countering Foreign Propaganda and Disinformation Act."³ Essentially, the CSCC, and later the GEC, was "focused on countering the actions and ideology of al-Qaida, its affiliates and adherents, and other international terrorist organizations and violent extremists overseas, and directed to audiences outside the United States."⁴ CSCC and GEC received a fair amount of attention in the press and on the internet for producing a wide range of online content aimed at actively trolling terrorists, with varied results.⁵

Basically, GEC acts as a clearing house for U.S. governmental information dispersal, relying on personnel drawn from the State, Defense and Treasury Departments, as well as from various intelligence agencies and USAID, to "harvest" data into advertising into advertising campaigns targeted at citizens and "terrorists," and attempts to cultivate local media outlets willing to repeat the approved messaging.⁶

³ *Textifire*, March 19, 2017, "SCL Group Joins the US State Dept.-Robert Mercer-funded Cambridge Analytica's foreign parent company signs a deal to do propaganda work for State's Global Engagement Center."

⁴ *Id.*

⁵ *Id.*

⁶ *Id.*

The only organization specifically identified in the GEC's charter as a target of the GEC's information campaign is al-Qaida. However, for those most knowledgeable about its' operations, such as then Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, one of the major objectives of GEC was to fight Russia's mounting disinformation campaign around the globe. In fact, in Clinton's first post-election speech on December 8, 2016, which was the same day as the National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) vote, Clinton noted GEC's potential "to boost the government's response to foreign propaganda, e.g. misleading news stories planted by Russia or "non-state actors" during election cycles with the intent of "driving widespread conversation and belief."⁷

Ironically, only a couple of months later, the Company that helped Trump mount the largest political campaign designed to influence and manipulate American voters with the use of psychological and emotional profiling -- Cambridge Analytica/SCL Group -- was now being given control of GEC, one of the largest U.S. player in the global battle to control the hearts and minds on an international scale.

In an 2015 article for a NATO publication, Steve Tatham, a British military psyops expert who leads SCL's defense business outside of the United States, explained that one of the benefits of using the company's techniques is that it "can be undertaken covertly." As a private company with public funding, SCL and CA are now poised engage in covert operations for the Trump Administration both here and abroad.

Nature abhors a vacuum, and SCL/Cambridge Analytica seems ready, willing and able to fill it. With key State Department positions intentionally left vacant by the Trump

⁷ Id.

Administration, and with its chief envoy tasked with neutering the Department – Rex Tillerson – seemingly intent on accomplishing that mission, Cambridge Analytica/SCL has more than obliged to move into the void. Under the NDAA, GEC and related entities control approximately \$160 million in funding. That is an exceedingly attractive budget for CA/SCL or any other private contractor.

As of this writing, GEC's leader, the position of Special Envoy and Coordinator, remains vacant since the departure of Michael Lumpkin on January 20, 2017. Literally dozens of other key posts at State remain vacant, and since Trump's new budget proposal blueprint calls for a 29% reduction in the State Department budget, it seems inevitable that the GEC and other key functions will be "out-sources" to SCL and other contractors who swear allegiance to the Trump program, *i.e.*, blowing up as many U.S. agencies as possible.

Closely paralleling the privatization of the GEC's critical mission in the war on terrorism is the change in regulations relating to the Broadcasting Board of Governors (BBG), which is in the throes of a major reorganization. The BBG oversees a number of international news firms, such as Voice of America (VOA) and Radio Free Europe (RFE). In an amendment to the NDAA, however, the Board of the BBG was effectively disbanded, replaced by a CEO that can be now "hired & fired" by the President.

Even more alarming than the fact that President Trump now effectively controls the U.S. government's news outlets overseas is the fact that changes in the NDAA since 2013 now make BBG organization's news content available to American citizens for the first time. Historically, Congress prevented VOA and RFE from reaching the domestic U.S. audiences, for fear that

these news outlets could be used to spread “homeland propaganda” and manipulation of domestic politics by whatever Administration was in power at any given time.⁸

Despite assurance by the BBG’s new Trump-appointed CEO that there is no plan to turn the BBG news outlets into a government-sponsored equivalent of pro-Trump news outlets such as Breitbart News, Fox News, InfoWars or the Washington Examiner, the staffing up of the BBG with energetic young recruits from the Trump campaign has been disconcerting, to say the least. As the creative content of news and other content increasingly targets the exponentially growing audience on the world-wide borderless internet, the use of psychological profiling, analytics and opaque algorithms to influence and manipulate public perceptions and voter reactions is bound to continue to increase.⁹ Cambridge Analytics and SCL Group are their waiting for large share of that market, especially given their recent track record on behalf of the Trump Campaign and the Brexit EU campaign in the UK.

According to the Behavioral Dynamics Institute (BDi), the research arm of SCL also founded by Nigel Oakes, BDi’s stated goal is

to assemble and assimilate the full extent of creative and scientific knowledge on group behavior and the dynamics of change, and package it into a unified and workable methodological approach to conducting successful and measurable behavior change campaigns.

“Behavior change campaign” is precisely the kind of language used by the military when describing psychological operations, a/k/a PSYOPS. On an equal footing in the military with

⁸ Id.

⁹ Id.

Information Operations, Media Operations, and Electronic Warfare, PSYOPS is designed to alter the behavior, perceptions and attitudes of target audiences and groups. Also referred to as Military Information Support Operations (MISO), this typically involves either “Influence Activities,” which influence the will of targets, or “Counter Command Activities,” which affect the capability of targets to act.

The SCL Group’s contract with the State Department will apparently be just the first wave of government contracts for SCL and Cambridge Analytica, with its major objective being to influence and manipulate public opinion in favor of President Trump’s political agenda. SCL and its American affiliate – Cambridge Analytica -- has hired additional staffers who are working out of a new office down the street from the White House.

Senior Cambridge Analytica and SCL Group personnel have also met with officials in key national security agencies on how its psychological profiling technology could be used to identify and deter terrorists, and to assess and influence attitudes and opinions regarding immigrants.¹⁰ Alexander Nix, CEO of Cambridge Analytica, acknowledged recent outreach to federal agencies and a stepped-up effort to secure U.S. government business.¹¹

Former NSA Flynn’s fingerprints continue to be all over the efforts by SCL and CA to embed themselves into the Trump Administration and its federal agencies. Flynn was an advisor to SCL in the past, and one of Flynn’s former aides at the Office of the Director of National

¹⁰ Id.

¹¹ Id.

Intelligence, Josh Weerasinghe, is playing a leading role in its current business campaign to win government contracts.

According to CEO Nix, Cambridge Analytica now boasts a database of 230 million American adults, with up to 5,000 pieces of demographic, consumer and lifestyle information about each individual – primarily from Facebook, Twitter and other social media platforms -- as well as psychological information people have shared with the company through quizzes on social media and extensive surveys.

During a speech at a New York conference in September 2016, Nix candidly set forth his vision: “By having hundreds and hundreds of thousands of Americans undertake this survey, we were able to form a model to predict the personality of every single adult in the United States of America.” Left unspoken was Cambridge Analytica’s growing ability to not only “predict” behavior based upon personality and psychological modeling, but also to influence and manipulate each person’s behavior, whether it be for good or for evil.

Big Brother is not just watching you; he is manipulating you.

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